RESOURCE BOOKLET
study skills and plagiarism

Contents

Introduction

The aim of the study skills and plagiarism workshop is to raise your awareness to important aspects of studying in Higher Education and to highlight the connection between:

- **your expectations of your study experience**
- **recognising teachers' expectations**
- **understanding academic requirements (including referencing and plagiarism guidelines)**
- **the importance of acquiring good study habits, as well as course-based skills, and**
- **seeking help and guidance as needed.**

The following notes provide some extra materials to supplement the 'study skills and plagiarism workshop'. They are compiled specifically for students in Computer Science courses, as many resources do not cover the conventions applicable to writing computer code. The notes are intentionally brief and are to assist you to follow up more detailed resources, both online and hard copy. You are encouraged to use as many of the resources mentioned here as possible and to take time to familiarise yourself with referencing/citation conventions for your specific study area. The resources in this booklet may be of use throughout your studies to refer to whenever you are doing assignments.

1.   Learning at University: what can I expect and what do teachers expect of me?

Whatever your most recent background, studying at RMIT will offer you the chance to learn many interesting things. In Computer Science, you will gain a range of IT and computing skills. However, study in Higher Education requires a lot more than learning skills specific to your study area.

Starting with your first classes in Computer Science (unless you already have a degree from an Australian University) you are likely to notice major differences from your previous studies including:

> ➢ the way teachers interact with students
> ➢ teachers' expectations of students
> ➢ the structure and styles of teaching, and
> ➢ class sizes.

Probably the most significant difference will be the amount and type of input expected from you as a student. University students need to be 'active and independent learners' (see section 5 for further information about active learning). Lecturers will not teach all of the content of your courses: lectures usually provide a broad overview and explain the lecture notes, then lab sessions and tutorials are used to practise some specific skills. There is an automatic expectation (from lecturers) that what is not covered directly, you will read and practise in your own time, and that where something is unclear you will ask you lecturers and tutors for further explanation.

To be successful at University, you will also need to develop skills in 'learning how to learn'. If you read widely outside classes, do extra lab exercises, experiment with some of what you're taught and ask questions you will have a much greater chance of succeeding in your Uni studies. University offers a lot of freedom, with very few hours spent in classes, leaving you to manage your 'spare' time. Some students find this aspect of University confusing and many are not sure how to use their non-class time effectively. Your School (CS & IT) and the University provide special services where you can learn general study skills and can receive extra support for your learning beyond your course area. You can learn how to better manage your time, be an active learner, how to ask questions and more. University services, which are free to students, are listed in Section 5 below (URLs are also provided).

There is a direct connection between students' approaches to learning, their study skills and plagiarism. Students who are not well organised or have conflicting priorities (e.g. long working hours) may take shortcuts or miss crucial pieces of information about what is required for assessment. Sometimes students don't pay enough attention to thoroughly referencing their work and end up submitting unreferenced pieces of other people's work. This is also counted as plagiarism.

The following sections outline the most important points you need to be aware of to avoid plagiarism, including: definitions, University policies, expected practice in Computer Science, and seeking assistance when you have difficulties.

2.   Why is plagiarism such a big deal?

You will have seen posters pinned around the corridors and on notice-boards at RMIT advising you of the University's stance on plagiarism. Most students have some idea that plagiarism is a form of cheating and commonly refer to it as 'copying'. However, students are often unsure exactly what plagiarism is and why plagiarism guidelines exist. Some students only explore these issues when their assignment work is found to contain poor referencing or plagiarised sections.

Many students enter University thinking that plagiarism means copying an entire assignment, either from a book, the web, or from a friend. If you copy a whole assignment, you have certainly cheated, however plagiarism relates to even small segments of work. You may quote and refer to others' work, however it must be fully referenced.

The word plagiarism comes from a latin word meaning 'to plunder' (steal), originally taken from the word 'plagium' (kidnapping) (Collins Concise Dictionary, 1989) (see more about University definitions in section 3). When you prepare an assignment, you are expected to create an original piece of work, using reference material from existing sources to inform you along the way. Wherever you refer to or use someone else's ideas, words, computer code, graphic designs, musical compositions, etc, you're expected to clearly state where those ideas came from. This expectation may be different from your previous learning experiences at school and/or in other countries.

Your teachers at University, or academics, often have many other roles as well as teaching. Some are researchers, writers and academic administrators. In Computer Science, academics frequently work or have worked in industry. Scientific and academic integrity are core values held by academics worldwide. Properly acknowledging sources is part of this value set. Only some of you may go on into academia, however, workplaces also expect employees to adhere to copyright requirements and follow referencing conventions. This is particularly so for programmers, or for any kind of software developer. When preparing assignments, working out your own solution to a problem and learning to correctly acknowledge sources is important for your success at University, as well as preparing you well for the workplace.

Students often think avoiding plagiarism means they cannot discuss their work with others. That is not the case: discussion and interaction with friends and classmates are encouraged. Your assignment work will sometimes be individual and sometimes in groups. When working in a group it is still very important that your contribution is your own work and sources are properly cited. Aim to make each member of the group an equal contributor to the final assignment you submit. When doing individual assignments, you need to find a way to discuss your work without actually sharing solutions, essays (or parts thereof), diagrams or code portions with your classmates and other people you study or work with. You're likely to learn a lot more if you can discover your own method of doing something, and can work out your own solution. Seeking help along the way is fine, as long as you don't actually borrow work or provide your work to others.

3.   Plagiarism Definitions and Guidelines

3.1   University Plagiarism Guidelines

At RMIT plagiarism is defined as follows:

"Plagiarism: the presentation of the work, idea or creation of another person as though it is your own. It is a form of cheating and is a very serious academic offence that may lead to expulsion from the University. Plagiarised material can be drawn from, and presented in, written, graphic and visual form, including electronic data, and oral presentations. Plagiarism occurs when the origin of the material used is not appropriately cited.

Examples of plagiarism include:
• Copying sentences or paragraphs word-for-word from one or more sources, whether published or unpublished, which could include but is not limited to books, journals, reports, theses, websites, conference papers, course notes, etc. without proper citation;

• Closely paraphrasing sentences, paragraphs, ideas or themes without proper citation;

• Piecing together text from one or more sources and adding only linking sentences;

• Copying or submitting whole or parts of computer files without acknowledging their source;

• Copying designs or works of art and submitting them as your original work;

• Copying a whole or any part of another student's work; and

• Submitting work as your own that someone else has done for you."

from RMIT Plagiarism Policy 2003, accessed 4 February, 2004, p 1.
http://mams.rmit.edu.au/1oavdg0bdd1.pdf

The full RMIT Plagiarism Policy can be found at: http://mams.rmit.edu.au/1oavdg0bdd1.pdf

If your work is found to contain plagiarized work, including poor or insufficient referencing, you can be penalized in a variety of ways. The least severe is a reprimand and the most severe, expulsion from the University. Other possible penalties are failing an assignment (which may cause you to fail a course) and losing marks.

3.1.1 Avoiding penalties – summary of the RMIT plagiarism procedure

RMIT recognizes that students may not fully understand referencing requirements at first, and students are not automatically penalized for plagiarizing. If you hand in work where some sections are poorly referenced (e.g. not following conventions properly), you could be notified by the marker that you had lost marks for that section of work and warned to reference more carefully in future.

If, however, you have submitted work which is substantially the same as another student's or is otherwise found not to be your own and/or not referenced, you would be invited to a hearing to explain why that was the case. The chair of that hearing would decide on the appropriate penalty after hearing the case. Students found to have plagiarized more than once are given far more serious penalties than on the first occasion. The main intention of the plagiarism policy is to encourage students to devise their own solutions to problems (both scientific and social) and this involves appropriate citation of sources used.

The full RMIT plagiarism procedure (relating to the Plagiarism Policy) can be found at: http://mams.rmit.edu.au/ud15gbwp9f1.pdf

3.2 Computer Science Plagiarism Guidelines

Further information about plagiarism and Computer Science can be found from the Computer Science home page: http://www.cs.rmit.edu.au/students/plagiarism.shtml
You are encouraged to read this before you begin your studies.

Postgraduate students are given a handbook specific to their program. Read the section under 'Plagiarism' (from the alphabetic listings) in your handbook. These handbooks are also accessible at: http://www.rmit.edu.au/csit/postgraduate.

4.   Referencing and Citation resources

4.1   University Resources

RMIT's library website provides clear, comprehensive guidelines on how to cite many different types of sources: e.g. books, journals, websites. Remember to use the correct reference guide for the source you have used. Seek assistance from Library staff, or from your Teaching & Learning Advisors in Computer Science if you are unsure about how to reference. There are different referencing styles, for example, Harvard and APA. You can ask your lecturer to nominate a preferred style. If none is recommended, choose one, and stick to it. Don't mix referencing styles within one piece of work.

To access the library's guidelines, go to the following URL:
http://www.rmit.edu.au/library/guides. Click on 'referencing resources'.

Note: *There are no specific guidelines listed on this site for referencing computer code. See the next section for further information about code-specific referencing.*

In Computer Science, always read your course guides, news phorum notices and notes provided in lectures carefully, as they may give referencing and/or formatting instructions for a specific assignment or report.

If you are studying in another area of RMIT, be careful to observe that School's referencing conventions, as they may differ from those in Computer Science.

4.2   Referencing and use of others' programming code.

When studying in a Computer Science or IT Program, many of your assignment tasks will ask you to write your own code. Any text or reports you write to accompany your code must follow correct referencing standards/conventions, as indicated above. Computer code has its own set of requirements for referencing and you are expected to reference sources you use according to these conventions.

The following directions from the Computer Science Postgraduate Handbooks are a very clear guide to referencing sources when programming:

> "The only case in which it is acceptable for a student to include other people's work in an assignment is when there is explicit permission from the lecturer. In this case, the part of the assignment that is copied must be clearly acknowledged. For example, if the copied work is included in a program, the program should include all of the following forms of acknowledgement:
>
> • A detailed comment at the start of the program stating that part of it is copied, and stating who wrote the copied part.
>
> • Clear comments in the body of the program marking the start and end of the copied material. These comments must also give the name of the author.

- If code has been obtained from elsewhere, then modified by the student, the modifications need to be explained. For example, a comment might have the wording "The original code obtained from Jos Leubnitz was modified to print more detailed error messages". Each adaptation of the original code should be documented.
- For copyright material, the documentation should also include a statement that permission was obtained from the author, and an email address where the permission can be verified.

Acknowledgements of this kind are required even for code provided by a lecturer as part of the assessment. Note that material on the internet is copyright unless the author explicitly states otherwise. (For example, some software includes a GNU public licence, which states that the code can be copied under certain conditions. However, even in this case it is essential that authorship be clearly identified.) Thus students must obtain permission from the author if they wish to include material from the internet or from a textbook. If an assignment includes quotes (that is, short pieces of text or program drawn from other places), there should be clear citations to the original sources."

(School of Computer Science and IT Postgraduate Handbooks (2003, December, 11) Chapter 11, Section 11.43, Plagiarism, retrieved 4 February 2004, from Computer Science website: http://www.rmit.edu.au/csit/mc061book and http://www.rmit.edu.au/csit/mc062book.)

If you have not programmed before, these instructions may seem confusing. You are advised to return to this advice once you have learnt to code and can apply it to your code writing. The main message is that referencing applies to programming code, just as it does to other work you produce. There are correct ways to reference and reuse code and you need to learn how to do this as you learn to program.

4.3   Plagiarism Detection

In Computer Science, checking for original work is done both manually and electronically. Coding assignments are regularly checked using electronic plagiarism detection software and other forms of online detection. Usually several mechanisms are used together for greater accuracy.

5.   Understanding and avoiding plagiarism

5.1   Common Reasons why students Plagiarise and Seeking Help

Research shows that the main reasons students plagiarise are time pressures, study planning issues and ignorance of or confusion about the referencing requirements (Sheard, Markham & Dick, 2003; Franklyn-Stokes & Newstead, 1995). New students are particularly vulnerable to these pitfalls, being unused to the amount of freedom and the lack of structure and guidance compared to their previous schooling. *Recognising the value of your non-class time and using it well, and learning to plan ahead are two vital skills that can lead to study success.*

Personal and financial difficulties can also affect your ability to stay on track with your studies. If you find yourself not coping on your own, you need to seek help from staff to find solutions. In the School of Computer Science and Information Technology, contact your Academic Advisor or a Teaching and Learning Advisor if you are having study problems or personal difficulties. The names and contact details of advisors can be found

from on the Computer Science home page (www.cs.rmit.edu.au) or from the Computer Science Office (10.10.7). The back of your student diary contains a list of support services provided to you as a student of RMIT. Services include: counselling, the Learning Skills Unit, Careers Service, Medical Service and many more. Further contact details can be found at:
http://www.rmit.edu.au/students and http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=b3mism7rz4jd.

5.2   Online resources: plagiarism avoidance and study skills

The following online resources can be worked through relatively quickly, and in your own time. You can gain a better understanding of how to write and prepare assignment work by checking step-by-step examples.

The following tutorial from James Cook University introduces active learning skills:
http://www.jcu.edu.au/studying/services/studyskills/notetaking/active.html

To learn about 'avoiding plagiarism', go to RMIT's site:
http://aps.eu.rmit.edu.au/lsu/resources/projects/plagiarism/index.html

Other useful guides on the RMIT learning skills site are found at:
http://aps.eu.rmit.edu.au/lsu/resources/links/think.html and
http://aps.eu.rmit.edu.au/lsu/resources/links/study.html
Click on the area of interest for a range of downloadable resources.

The following site at Deakin University also provides some excellent online tutorials in study skills and avoiding plagiarism:
http://www.deakin.edu.au/studentlife/academic_skills/undergraduate/index.php

References:

Collins Concise Dictionary (1989). London: William Collins Sons & Co.

Franklyn-Stokes, A. & Newstead, S.E. (1995). Undergraduate Cheating: who does what and why? *Studies in Higher Education*, 20(2) 159-172.

Sheard, J., Markham, S. & Dick, M. (2003), Investigating Differences in Cheating Behaviours of IT Undergraduate and Graduate Students: The maturity and motivation factors. *Higher Education Research & Development*. 22(1), 91-108. Retrieved 30 April, 2003, Ingenta Select Database.